

**Sectarian Violence and the Beautiful Game:  
The Parallel Histories of the Irish Troubles and the Old Firm**

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Frederick Suppe". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with the first letter 'F' being particularly large and stylized.

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## **Abstract**

Formed in 1873 and 1887 respectively, the histories of Scottish football titans Glasgow Rangers and Glasgow Celtic have been notoriously intertwined with the history of the peoples across the Irish Sea. As win totals grew for each club, so too did the number of individuals imposing religious affiliations on the clubs, heightening tensions between the clubs and their fans. The Easter Rising in 1916 and the subsequent creation of the Irish Free State furthered the rift between Protestants and Catholics not only in Ireland but across all of Britain. The religious impositions of the Old Firm rivalry between Celtic and Rangers took on new meaning as the Scottish clubs flew the Irish Tricolour and Union Jack at their grounds in Glasgow, embracing this identity as a part of their heritage. Throughout the Twentieth Century, the Old Firm rivalry has reflected the tensions in Belfast and Derry and as such can be considered a proxy-war of sorts for the Irish Troubles. In order to support this conclusion, I give the brief parallel histories of the Irish Troubles and the Old Firm, focusing on the moments where the histories are intertwined and the consequences of those moments.

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You'll know us by our noise  
We're up to our knees in fenian blood  
Surrender or you'll die  
For we are The Brighton Derry Boys<sup>1</sup>

The words to the above song are not those of an intimidating military organization, but rather the words that supporters of a football club carry as an anthem against their hated cross-town rival. From soon after its creation, Rangers Football Club has been at odds with Celtic Football Club despite both calling the city of Glasgow home. Steeped in the local rivalry are generations of sectarian hatred spilling over from hundreds of years of conflict that extends well beyond Glasgow but finds a common battleground on the pitches of Ibrox and Celtic Park. The international growth of these two clubs has changed the complexion of the rivalry, known as “the Old Firm”, but the deep hatred between the two rival clubs’ supporters marks the continued sectarian divide that exists.

The history of the Old Firm, as the rivalry has been termed, cannot be told without also examining the sectarianism long associated with the derby. The story of the Old Firm goes back to the sixteenth century when the Protestant Reformation began to sweep across Europe. With the conversion of Scotland’s southern neighbor to the Church of England, Scotland began to see changes of its own. Reformer John Knox led a reformation in the country and by 1560 Glasgow’s last Catholic bishop fled the country to Paris.<sup>2</sup> A decade of violence marked Scotland as the country saw a distinct shift in religious acceptance. Catholicism became a faith to be purged in Lowland Scotland, and

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<sup>1</sup> Aiden Smith, *Heartfelt: Supping Bovril from the Devil’s Cup*, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Glasgow City Council. 28 March 2007. *History of Glasgow: 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. <<http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/AboutGlasgow/History/16th+and+17th+Centuries.htm>> [12 November 2009].



most hints of the papist religion were extinguished as the Reformation took hold. As Scotland became increasingly Presbyterian, Catholics in the country were forced into hiding or exile.<sup>3</sup>

The next three hundred years saw significant growth in Glasgow. Located ideally between the Scottish capital Edinburgh, the Highlands, and Ireland, the city rapidly became a key center for commerce. With the Treaty of Union in 1707, Glasgow began extensive trade with the New World, focusing on the tobacco trade until the American Revolution, and subsequently shifting to the sugar and spice trade with the West Indies. A significant improvement in trade came in 1770 when civil engineer John Golborne discovered a way to remove the layers of silt from the Clyde riverbank and allow larger vessels into Glasgow. The establishment of the Port of Glasgow allowed for an even more incredible growth in the following century.<sup>4</sup>

The Industrial Revolution reached Glasgow just as the new Port of Glasgow was opened, bringing another distinct cultural change. The newly opened port provided easier access for industry and textile businesses boomed through the British Isles. As industry began to grow, an influx of immigrants poured into Glasgow. The Highland Clearances of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries brought highland clansmen into the city of Glasgow, where they struggled to find work and somewhere to live.

While Scotland sought to purge itself of the Catholics over the course of three centuries, Ireland had continued as a haven for the Roman church. As the old story goes, around the Fourth Century AD a young man was captured, sold into slavery, learned

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<sup>3</sup> Franklin Foer, How Soccer Explains the World, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Glasgow City Council. 28 March 2007. History of Glasgow: 18<sup>th</sup> Century. <<http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/AboutGlasgow/History/18th+Century.htm>> [12 November 2009].

Christianity, escaped, and returned to Ireland to convert the people there to follow Christ. Following the efforts of Ireland's patron, Saint Patrick, the island traditionally turned to its religion with faith, passion, and devotion. This passion and devotion intensified as the Irish clung to their independent identity as the English began to impose their will over the island.

In 1495, English King Henry VII extended English law over all of Ireland, seeking to extend the power of the English monarchy over all of the British Isles. Among his power moves, he took control of Irish parliament and proposed changes to the Irish Catholic Church to align it more with the English Church.<sup>5</sup> When his son Henry VIII disassociated with the Catholic Church in Rome and founded his own Anglican Church, he too sought to exercise dominion over the Irish by removing their attachment to the Papacy. These attempts only intensified the resistance of the Irish, but by the middle of the Eighteenth Century, Catholics in Ireland, despite representing the majority, were made second-class citizens. Emblematic of this degradation, in 1727 Catholics were denied all public offices and the right to vote in their own country.<sup>6</sup>

The population of Ireland had been steadily growing during the time of English domination, but in the mid-1800s, the population dramatically decreased for a variety of reasons. The inability of individuals in Ireland to govern themselves led to resentment and protest against the English, but with little result. Failure of potato crops exacerbated the problems of the nation, especially the Catholics who typically could be found in the poorer peasant families throughout the country. From 1841-1851, the population of

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<sup>5</sup> "A Brief History of Ireland", *Journal of Online Genealogy*.

<sup>6</sup> Tim Lambert, "A Brief History of Ireland", *A World History Encyclopedia* <<http://www.localhistories.org/irehist.html>>.

Ireland fell from 8.2 million people to less than 6.6 million.<sup>7</sup> Among the decrease in population were those who died of starvation. Many who survived fled the country to find a better life elsewhere, particularly in the United States, but also across the Irish Sea to form communities in Glasgow, Scotland. The potato famine in Ireland provided the shipyards there another vast pool of cheap, unskilled labor, but also brought something that hadn't been prevalent in Scotland for several hundred years: Catholicism.



*Map of the British Isles with the locations of Belfast and Glasgow marked. Note the Port of Glasgow would be located on the west coast, making the proximity of the two cities seem even closer.<sup>8</sup>*

Anti-Catholic sentiment ran rampant with this new stream of immigrants who seemed to be stealing the few jobs that were available as crowding became an issue. As Franklin Foer writes in *How Soccer Explains the World*:

Thousands of immigrants escaped to Glasgow seeking relief. They'd been among the poorest, least educated émigrés – the ones who couldn't afford tickets to Boston and New York. Dazed by their new home and excluded from society, they had little choice but to stick mostly to themselves. A structure of virtual apartheid evolved.<sup>9</sup>

Catholics attended their own schools, lived in separate sections of Glasgow, and started their own professional firms because the majority Protestant business owners

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<sup>7</sup> "A Brief History of Ireland", *Journal of Online Genealogy*

<sup>8</sup> "Belfast and Glasgow",

<[http://www.rnid.org.uk/VirtualContent/85713/RNID\\_locations\\_map.gif](http://www.rnid.org.uk/VirtualContent/85713/RNID_locations_map.gif)>.

<sup>9</sup> Foer, *How Soccer Explains the World*, p. 44.

often refused to hire Catholic employees. A Marist monk Father Walfred saw the potential influence of Protestant missionaries whose wealth could sway Catholics from their faith in order to have material comfort. In order to fill the void and break the myth of Catholic inferiority, Father Walfred founded a football club that he hoped could win convincingly. Celtic Football Club was thus founded in St. Mary's Church Hall in Calton District of Glasgow on November 6, 1887. The club was originally founded to provide a fund raising capability for a charity Father Walfred had established, much in the ilk of Edinburgh club Hibernian (also founded by Irish Catholics). Celtic quickly became a potent force in Scottish football, signing players from Hibernian and winning championships in four of their first six seasons.<sup>10</sup>

Rangers Football Club began without any political or religious leanings. The four men that founded the club came up with the name based on an English rugby club whose name they saw in a book. The official date associated with the founding of Rangers is 1873, and soon after the club joined the Scottish Football Association where it began winning, reaching the Scottish Cup Final in 1877.<sup>11</sup> According to Franklin Foer, however, Protestant Scotland would not stand by as a Catholic football side won all of their trophies. "When it racked up wins against Celtic, Protestant Scotland imposed religious and political aspirations upon [Rangers] and gradually adopted [the club] as its own."<sup>12</sup>

At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Glasgow was a booming city filled with industrial strength and economic prosperity. The growth of Glasgow was so great during the

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<sup>10</sup> Celtic FC Official Website, "A Brief History,"  
<<http://www.celticfc.net/home/about/briefHistory.aspx>> [15 November 2009].

<sup>11</sup> Rangers FC Official Website, "Founding Fathers,"  
<[http://www.rangers.premiumtv.co.uk/articles/the-founding-fathers-20090227\\_2255467\\_1570943](http://www.rangers.premiumtv.co.uk/articles/the-founding-fathers-20090227_2255467_1570943)> [15 November 2009].

<sup>12</sup> Foer, *How Soccer Explains the World*, p. 45.

previous centuries that it had been deemed “The Second City of the Empire”. The industrial growth was especially impressive. The Port of Glasgow triggered not only cultural changes, but also industrial changes. The shipbuilding industry latched onto Glasgow’s potential; between 1870 and 1918, over one-fifth of the world’s ships came from a Glaswegian shipyard.<sup>13</sup> However, this incredible continued growth did not last forever; following World War I, Glasgow saw a marked economic slide as demand for shipbuilding disappeared in the depressed world economy.<sup>14</sup> German and American industry outclassed their Scottish counterparts, creating intense competition within Scotland for limited jobs. “The inevitable religious scapegoating kicked in, and the Church of Scotland began grouching about the Irish menace.”<sup>15</sup> With this turn to sectarian aggression, the Old Firm became more toxic in nature.

On April 24, 1916, Easter Monday, a poet by the name of Padraig Pearse appeared on the steps of the General Post Office in Dublin, Ireland and, as World War I raged on the European continent, read his famous “Proclamation of 1916”, establishing “The Provisional Government of the Irish Republic to the People of Ireland”. The British were outraged that their Irish neighbors would attempt revolution during a time of national crisis, and the British retaliation was swift. Within a week, the Easter Rising was suppressed and in early May those who signed the Proclamation were executed by firing squad. While many in Dublin were bewildered by the Rising, they were more appalled by

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<sup>13</sup> Glasgow City Council. 28 March 2007. History of Glasgow: The Second City. <<http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/AboutGlasgow/History/The+Second+City.htm>> [15 November 2009].

<sup>14</sup> Glasgow City Council. 28 March 2007. History of Glasgow: Industrial Decline. <<http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/AboutGlasgow/History/Industrial+Decline.htm>> [15 November 2009].

<sup>15</sup> Foer, How Soccer Explains the World, p. 45.

the British idea of justice and the subsequent occupation of Dublin by the British Army.<sup>16</sup> Cries for independence grew as political parties like *Sinn Fein* gained influence and culminated a wider war for Irish independence between 1919 and 1921.



*A picture of the General Post Office in Dublin dated 1916<sup>17</sup>*

The Irish War for Independence consisted primarily of guerilla warfare between the Irish Republican Army (IRA), loyal to *Sinn Fein* and the revolutionaries, and the Royal Irish Constabulary (Black and Tans), consisting primarily of British veterans of the First World War. As the casualties mounted for both sides, retribution against civilians became a very real issue further cementing the Irish loathing of the British occupants.<sup>18</sup> In 1920, the British Parliament proposed the Better Government of Ireland Act, or Home Rule, creating the Irish Free State as a self-governing dominion within the British Empire. The IRA deemed the terms of this act unacceptable and the fighting continued into 1921. Realizing that the situation was deteriorating for the IRA, Commander-in-Chief of the National Army Michael Collins joined in the negotiations to end the conflict. In late 1921, the Anglo-Irish Treaty made formal the establishment of an Irish Free State

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<sup>16</sup> Lambert, "A Brief History of Ireland".

<sup>17</sup> "General Post Office", <<http://www.easter1916.net/GPO1916.jpg>>.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Dixon, Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace, p. 23-25.

while allowing for the six northeastern counties (Ulster) to opt out of the Irish Free State and remain loyal to Great Britain. Signing of the treaty was controversial in Ireland because it did not provide for a united Ireland. Upon the signing of the treaty, Michael Collins famously stated, “I have signed my own death warrant.” Anti-treaty members of the IRA killed Collins in an ambush a year later.<sup>19</sup>

The growing divisions and violence in Ireland added fuel to the growing rivalry of the football clubs in Glasgow, Scotland. Celtic began flying the flag of the Irish Free State, while Rangers fans began to fly the Union Jack in response, as the club began to boast its orange supporters’ badges.<sup>20</sup> Anti-Catholic sentiment ran rampant in Glasgow, with even the Glasgow police claiming that there was a connection between football disturbances and Irish Catholicism.<sup>21</sup>



*Rangers fans form a Union Jack before a match at Ibrox in 2006<sup>22</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Hopkinson, Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War, p. 176-177.

<sup>20</sup> Gary Armstrong, Fear and Loathing in World Football pp. 25-26.

<sup>21</sup> J.A. Mangan, Sport in Europe, p.172.

<sup>22</sup> “Union Jack at Ibrox”,

<[http://image51.webshots.com/151/9/30/45/2374930450082183219kLaNGB\\_ph.jpg](http://image51.webshots.com/151/9/30/45/2374930450082183219kLaNGB_ph.jpg)>.

This paper opened with the lyrics of a song attached to the Protestant supporters of Rangers. That song originates from a group of Protestant thugs called The Billy Boys gang who were openly hostile to Catholics, especially those who had the gall to support the Catholic club Celtic. Billy Fullerton, the associated leader of The Billy Boys, formed the group in Bridgeton Cross, in the east end of Glasgow during the 1930s as a response to Billy being beaten by Catholic youths on a nearby street. The group picked up many like-minded men who, “felt they were being swamped by Irish Catholics from other Glasgow districts... The Billy Boys claimed Bridgeton Cross as their stronghold.” The Billy Boys often took Orange walks en masse through Catholic neighborhoods, even venturing to Belfast on occasion to stir up trouble. The heavy Protestant sentiment of this group endeared them to other Protestant groups of Glasgow, and forever an association between the Billy Boys and Rangers was made.<sup>23</sup>

The Catholic supporters of Celtic also earned a nickname based on sectarian divide. Hiroki Ogasawara explains, “One of the well-know nicknames of Celtic fans, ‘Tims’, is also derived from a 1920s Catholic street gang in the Calton district of Glasgow. ‘Tims’ is said to be an abbreviation of ‘Timalloys’ or ‘Tim Malloys’... although the real figure of Tim Malloys is elusive, ‘Tims’ might well be a generic reference to Irish immigrants in the city of Glasgow in General.”<sup>24</sup> These nicknames based on racial and religious groups highlight the distinct territorial and sectarian divide that is emphasized in the fan base of each club.

Rangers fans are loyal. Celtic fans are faithful.” The old motto is rich in the undertones of separateness. Loyal is Protestant, church, Ulster; faithful

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<sup>23</sup> Hiroki Ogasawara, Terror, Spectacle and Urban Myth in Glasgow Football Cultures, pp. 18-20.

<sup>24</sup> Ogasawara, Terror, Spectacle, and Urban Myth, p. 18.



is Catholic, chapel, Ireland. If there is an abyss between the two sides, the bridge across is of course a devotion to their teams which runs from the cradle to the grave.<sup>25</sup>

The rivalry was something a fan was born into and his/her situation in life made it difficult to change this circumstance. As Rangers fan Charlie Logan records, “In Scotland, with segregated schools, you’re almost bound to be a Rangers fan if you go to a Protestant school. A non-denominational school, sorry. You’re bound to be a Celtic fan if you go to a Catholic school – that follows as night follows day.”<sup>26</sup> This fierce loyalty/faithfulness and sectarian divide is even reflected in the teams themselves. Until the 1990s, the board of directors at Celtic were exclusively Catholic, and Rangers, likewise, exclusively Protestant. Early on, Celtic made the calculated decision to field non-Catholic players, as to acquire the absolute best talent in the world, but Rangers resisted and maintained an exclusively Protestant organization from top to bottom. Executives in the organization that even married a Catholic were denied promotion. Rangers went so far as to hold benefit matches in Belfast, with the proceeds going to North Irish chapters of an anti-Catholic fraternal organization called the Orange Order.<sup>27</sup>

The passion in the rivalry extended to all walks of life in Glasgow. In September 1953 at an Old Firm match at Rangers home, Ibrox, Celtic fans became riotous when police officers serving as security for the match tore down a green and white streamer banner while leaving the orange banners at the Rangers end of the stadium untouched. A riot broke out; 12 people were injured and 8 people were arrested. The *Glasgow Herald* reported of the incident, “the impression had been given that discrimination had been

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen Walsh, *Voices of the Old Firm*, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Walsh, *Voices*, p. 199.

<sup>27</sup> Foer, *How Soccer Explains the World*, pp. 45-46.

shown by the police.” The Scottish government and its associated government agencies, chiefly the Scottish Home and Health Department, pinpointed fans of Celtic as the perpetrators of the majority of issues at Scottish football matches, even at one point restricting the ability of the club to fly the Irish flag at Celtic Park. Again, Celtic seemed to be pinpointed as rabble-rousers and troublemakers simply because they and their supporters were Catholic in a predominantly Protestant nation. Only when there was a large recorded disturbance in a match between Glasgow Rangers and English club Newcastle United at St. James Park in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England was there a note made of the potential for Rangers to be equal culprits in the shenanigans taking place in matches around Scotland.<sup>28</sup>

The rivalry helped fuel the success of both clubs. The name for the rivalry, “the Old Firm”, is said to come from the mutual benefit commercially from the passion associated with the rivalry, though some claim it was originally coined during Celtic’s first match against Rangers<sup>29</sup>. The competitive nature of both clubs drove them to gain international successes. In 1967, Celtic became not only the first Scottish club but also the first British club to win the European Cup, defeating Italian side Inter Milan 2-1 at the Cup Final in Lisbon, Portugal. This victory allowed Celtic to stake a claim as the premier club in all of Europe. Celtic followed up the feat by making an appearance in the 1970 European Cup Final, but Dutch side Feyenoord defeated them 2-1. The grand success of the club allowed it to become not only a presence in Glasgow, but internationally. The success of a Scottish club also triggered national pride. Alex Bell, a young man at the

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<sup>28</sup> Mangan, *Sport in Europe*, pp. 175-179.

<sup>29</sup> A variety of sources list both, but neither option is fully clear on the origins of the name “Old Firm”. The only thing that is clear is that Celtic first played Rangers in 1888.

time, recorded, “As a Rangers fan in London I wanted Celtic to win the European Cup. I wanted a Scottish team to win it before an English team.”<sup>30</sup>

As Celtic’s influence grew, so did the influence of Rangers. In that magical year of 1967, not only did Celtic make a run deep into European competition, but Rangers also made certain to match the prowess of Celtic as best they could. They made it to the final of the Cup-Winner’s Cup, another major tournament in which the winners of each country’s respective domestic cups square off. Rangers were unfortunate to draw German side Bayern Munich as the Final was to be played in Nuremburg, Germany, essentially a home game for Bayern. The sectarian divide could be hardly seen for those few weeks when Glasgow was close to something magical. Rangers fan John Greig recalled:

I think I wanted Celtic to win the European Cup. I think that the city of Glasgow came very, very close to a magnificent achievement, with two clubs winning the two major European competitions that year. We- the two clubs together – were a whisker away from creating a record that would probably never be achieved again.<sup>31</sup>

The magic of that 1967 season soon came back to the resounding thud of reality. Rangers lost that match to Bayern Munich in 1967, and soon thereafter the two clubs gradually slid back down from the mountaintop of international football glory. A tragedy at the annual Old Firm match in 1971 shook the foundation of each club.

I remember something happened at the top and we all turned. I was with Archie McArthur at the top and then lost him. I saw an old guy – I can remember that old guy to this day – burling away down the hill, rolling down the steep hill, you know. I still don’t know what happened to him.<sup>32</sup>

Jack Jardine’s recollection of what became known as the Ibrox Disaster expresses the feeling that many who felt passion associated with both Celtic and Rangers. The

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<sup>30</sup> Walsh, *Voices*, p. 94.

<sup>31</sup> Walsh, *Voices*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>32</sup> Walsh, *Voices*, p. 98.

annual Old Firm match was being played at Rangers home, Ibrox. The match stood at a score of 0-0 in the late minutes of the second half when Celtic scored a goal that seemingly sealed victory. Streams of Rangers fans became pouring out down the stairs and out of the stadium, accepting their apparent defeat. In the final seconds of stoppage time, however, Rangers scored the equalizing goal to make it 1-1. The crowd erupted, creating a commotion on the stairwells as fans sprinted back up to see what had happened. This commotion, coupled with the failure of barriers on stairway 13, caused a massive chain-reaction pile-up of fans. Celtic fan Adam Shiels recalled, “The police just actually put rows and rows of bodies on the football park; is that not a sight to sadden everybody? Sixty-six people killed because of a goal.”<sup>33</sup>

The tragedy shook the foundation of each club, but the aftermath caused the realization that the abyss that divided the two clubs and their supporters was still far wider than anyone could imagine.

At the time, it seemed like it might do some good – if you can have any good come out of that. There were masses offered in all the churches for the victims; it was all Rangers supporters, every one, who died – and Celtic players attended services and so on along with the Rangers ones. It seemed as if people had learned there were more important things in life than a football match. But it didn’t last – in a game or two they were back to the usual hatred.<sup>34</sup>

The old songs of sectarian hatred bellowed through Ibrox and Celtic Park, with Celtic fans singing “IRA all the way, F\*\*\* the Queen and UDA”, to which Rangers fans replied “UDA all the way, F\*\*\* the Pope and IRA.”<sup>35</sup>

While some sectarian content was banned in Northern Ireland, the domination of

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<sup>33</sup> Walsh, *Voices*, p. 98.

<sup>34</sup> Walsh, *Voices*, p. 101.

<sup>35</sup> Walsh, *Voices*, p. 126.

the Unionist government made life as a Catholic minority in Northern Ireland quite difficult. The symbols of the 1916 Easter Rising were banned, but the annual Twelfth of July Orange parade was promoted.<sup>36</sup> Sectarianism was rampant and impacted daily life. An example of this sectarian discrimination is reflected from Joe McKinley during his first job application in North Belfast during 1968:

The first experience I ever had [of discrimination] and it was a hard one to learn, so it was, and I'll never forget it. It was a big firm now, Robinson and Cleaver's. I got an interview there one time for a job. It was in the warehouse, and it wasn't even on the shop floor. And I'm sitting out in the hall waiting to go into the interview and this young lad passed me, he worked in the place, and he says 'What's your name?' I said 'Joseph McKinley', and he says 'You've no chance of a job in here.' 'What do you mean?' He says 'What school do you go to?' I says 'Barnageeha, St. Patrick's Barnageeha, Antrim Road.' He says 'You're wasting your time.' I didn't understand what the young lad meant. Now that young lad was only an ordinary worker... I remember saying to my mummy about it and she says, well, you can expect that. I would say that was my first ever snub for being a Catholic. And I felt it like. Because I knew sitting in that interview that day, as soon as your man asked me what school I was from, there was no way I was going to get that job.<sup>37</sup>

In the late sixties, the emergence of the Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Ulster Volunteer Force rocked Northern Ireland. The Provos, as the new IRA was dubbed, sought a united Ireland as the oppression of the Catholics in Northern Ireland had reached a breaking point. The UVF was formed in order to maintain order and Loyalist domination of politics in Northern Ireland. In an eerie return to the methods of the Irish War of Independence, both the Provos and UVF vowed for violent retribution against those who aided enemy combatants.<sup>38</sup> Both sides issued warnings, like the one below issued by the UVF in May 1966:

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<sup>36</sup> Ronnie Munck, *The Making of the Troubles in Northern Ireland*, p. 212.

<sup>37</sup> Munck, *The Making of the Troubles*, p. 213.

<sup>38</sup> Lambert, "A Brief History of Ireland", *A World History Encyclopedia*.

From this day, we declare war against the IRA and its splinter groups. Known IRA men will be executed mercilessly and without hesitation. Less extreme measures will be taken against anyone sheltering or helping them, but if they persist in giving them aid, then more extreme methods will be adopted . . . we solemnly warn the authorities to make no more speeches of appeasement. We are heavily armed Protestants dedicated to this cause.<sup>39</sup>

Violence between the two sides grew and tensions rose as Catholics in Northern Ireland continued to protest for their rights. In 1971, the British government implemented internment without trial for suspected republican activists. All of those interned were Catholic and very few of them had any concrete links to organizations like the Provos.<sup>40</sup> In a movement mirroring the Civil Rights Movement of the late sixties in the United States, Catholics in cities like Belfast and Derry organized marches that became the lightning rods sparking more violence. Perhaps the most famous of these, civil rights demonstrators marching through Derry in January 1972 were fired upon, causing a massive panic. When the chaos subsided, a total of fourteen protestors died from wounds received at the hands of the British Army.

All of these things must've seemed a world away to most of Britain, but those in Glasgow were very much aware of the events occurring across the Irish Sea. As they watched on the "telly" for the scores from the latest matches around Scotland, Celtic and Rangers fans almost assuredly saw the violence in Belfast and Derry. That violence did little to temper the passions in the rivalry, however. As events continued to unfold during the 1970s and 1980s, fans from both sides embraced the sectarianism as part and parcel of the Old Firm.

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<sup>39</sup> Peter Taylor, Loyalists: War and Peace in Northern Ireland, p. 41-44.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor, Loyalists: War and Peace in Northern Ireland, p. 204.



*Mural commemorating Bloody Sunday at the Bogside in Derry, N. Ireland. On the right, Father Daly waves a bloodstained white handkerchief while escorting the mortally wounded Jackie Duddy. The British soldier trampling on the blood-stained "Civil Rights" sign was not a part of the original image, but added as part of the artistic remembrance of Bloody Sunday.<sup>41</sup>*

In his book *Belfast Diaries*, John Conroy tells of the toll that the Irish Troubles, as the conflict in Northern Ireland would become termed, took on the individual living at the battlefield of this guerilla war. One of the early stories Conroy shares about the horrors of this conflict describe an incident that marks the indiscriminate nature of the conflict. In 1975, a man came in to a chip shop owner by Mr. Meli, a Catholic shop owner in Belfast. After eating, the man left behind a transistor radio; Mr. Meli, believing the man would return for the radio, placed it under his counter. The next morning, while the children were playing with the knobs, the radio set exploded. "The radio was just the casing for a nail bomb... [Mrs. Meli] found her sons strewn and bloody around the living room... No one was ever charged with the Meli bombing... The Melis had been chosen as targets

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<sup>41</sup> "Bloody Sunday Mural",  
<[http://image51.webshots.com/51/6/2/49/467160249EYYubl\\_fs.jpg](http://image51.webshots.com/51/6/2/49/467160249EYYubl_fs.jpg)>.

simply because they were Catholics.”<sup>42</sup> This one scene depicts the dual tragedy of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Not only were the Melis the victims of indiscriminate violence that severely clearly innocent children, but also victims of the legal system in Northern Ireland that did little to assist in the search for the transgressor.

Conroy notes that even the lines between belligerents could be blurred; another one of the large tragedies of the fighting in Northern Ireland came when individuals were targets of violence from other individuals who were supposed to be supporting the same ideologies. Conroy tells the story of “Peter Murphy”, an alias, as an example of one of these tragedies; after a fight between two children escalated into a fight between the fathers, Peter was kneecapped by the Provos. Two years later he was accused of robbing a pub, took a swing at his accuser, and was promptly shot in the arm. “For the first offense, Peter was taken to a cemetery at gunpoint, shot, and abandoned. He almost bled to death. The second shooting occurred in an alley, and the nerve and muscle damage in his arm was so severe that today his hand is limp.”<sup>43</sup> The fear from these incidents stayed with those involved. “If you’re kneecapped... it always stays in your mind. You’re afraid because you never know who’s coming, who’s knocking at your door, or when it’s going to happen again.”<sup>44</sup> The ultimate irony in the situations involving Peter is that he came from a Republican family and had himself been a member of the IRA.

While the lines between who was targeted and who was not often failed to exist, there were definitive differences that would be noted in society. These distinct differences would mark who was a Catholic and who was Protestant.

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<sup>42</sup> John Conroy, Belfast Diaries, p. 43.

<sup>43</sup> Conroy, Belfast Diaries, p. 89.

<sup>44</sup> Conroy, Belfast Diaries, p. 89.



You can tell a man's religion from the cemetery he buries his people in, from the newspaper he reads, from the bus he rides, from the football team he roots for. In some neighborhoods, you can guess a man's faith quite accurately by noting which side of the street he walks on. If a kid plays cricket, he's not Catholic. If he carries a hurley stick, he's not Protestant. If he wears a scarf of green and white... he's certainly Catholic, as those are the colors of Catholic-backed soccer teams.<sup>45</sup>

Conroy also notes another tragic idea. "The history of Northern Ireland often seems to follow a script, with scenes repeated in each generation. The climax is some explosive act which diminishes all the ordinary violence and renews the troubles for the next generation. The leading man is often dead, or soon to be."<sup>46</sup> The hunger strike launched by Irish republican prisoners in 1981 created such a man in Bobby Sands. A group of prisoners held by the British refused food in protest against their status of being held as criminals rather than political prisoners. The hunger strike was organized in a manner so that staggered individual strikes would prolong the duration of the strike and maximize the exposure it would receive.<sup>47</sup>

As the hunger strike went on, the Provos began to prepare for what seemed an inevitable clash, warning civilians not only about leaving their homes for safety, but also that those caught in vandalism would be dealt with severely. Sands' death spawned a massive rally of support, but surprisingly was peaceful. Conroy wrote, "Gerry Adams, the movement's primary spokesman in the North, said that the IRA would respond in its own time; he asked the crowd not to walk on the graves as they left the cemetery and not to desecrate the day by getting into a confrontation with the security forces."<sup>48</sup> The place where Conroy was staying was across from a business infamous for employing only

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<sup>45</sup> Conroy, Belfast Diaries, pp. 108-109.

<sup>46</sup> Conroy, Belfast Diaries, p. 135.

<sup>47</sup> Taylor, Loyalists: War and Peace in Northern Ireland, p. 204.

<sup>48</sup> Conroy, Belfast Diaries, p. 171.

Protestants. “Some of the locals pushed a car up against Mackie’s and set it on fire, hoping the plant would burn as well... [We] wondered if the IRA planned to ambush the soldiers who would come to deal with the incident. I had had little sleep all week, however, and I went to bed while the flames were still intense... It’s surprising what you can accept as routine after so short a time.”



*With Gerry Adams in the background, members of the Provisional Irish Republican Army fire their rifles in a salute at the funeral of Bobby Sands<sup>49</sup>*

The death of Bobby Sands and other hunger strikers did little to change the tone of sectarianism in the matches of the Old Firm back in Glasgow. In fact, Bobby Sands’ death soon too became the source of a chant by Rangers fans, taunting the Catholic fans of Celtic. “Well I’m going for my dinner now Bobby Sands (And you’re not getting none), Would you like me to bring back a doggy bag? There’s a bed made in Milltown

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<sup>49</sup> “Dark Past”, <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1262905/Gerry-Adams-admits-hes-proud-IRA-association--STILL-denies-membership.html>>.

just for you.”<sup>50</sup> Fear of retribution spread like wildfire and impacted the world of British football. The 1981 British Home Championship between football teams from England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland was cancelled when the English and Welsh Football Associations refused to send their teams to Northern Ireland for matches scheduled at Windsor Park in Belfast. The fallout from the fear of retribution led to the collapse of the British Home Championship, and in 1984 it ceased to exist.<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps a point of intrigue where art truly imitates life, Andrew Lloyd Webber, famous for his musicals such as *Phantom of the Opera*, wrote a musical with themes seemingly ripped from the headlines. In his musical *The Beautiful Game*, a non-sectarian football team from Belfast plays its last season together in 1969 before being ripped apart by the violence that swept Northern Ireland. That team dissolved when its members went separate ways, some to the UVF and some to the IRA. Ironically (or perhaps, not so ironically), that team truly existed in 1969, and one of the members of the club *Stella Maris* (Latin for “Star of the Sea) was none other than Bobby Sands. In an article about the upcoming play, journalist Denis Campbell wrote:

When [Sands] was 15 [he] and known as 'Sandsy'. Worse names would follow. 'He wasn't an IRA man then. He was our left-back who just lived for football and didn't talk about politics or religion.' Nobody at Star of the Sea did. Under the stern direction of Liam Conlon, a Belfast doctor, the team was stridently non-sectarian. 'There was friendly banter when Rangers or Celtic won or lost, but nothing more,' recalls O'Neill.

One of Sands's fellow defenders was Michael Atcheson. Within a couple of years, though, the onset of the Troubles had ruined their on-field partnership. Increasing sectarian violence saw Sands's family intimidated out of their mixed estate. They fled to a Catholic ghetto in west Belfast. The Star of the Sea team began to disintegrate and became almost entirely Catholic.

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<sup>50</sup> Lyrics to “Bobby Sands”, a song popular among Rangers supporters. The club itself does not officially approve of the song among its song list on the club website.

<sup>51</sup> Guy Oliver, *The Guinness Record of World Soccer*, pg. 741.

Soon after, Atcheson became a UVF terrorist. In 1974, as an 18-year-old, he machine-gunned a minibus full of workmen, injuring three Catholics, and was given 22 years in jail. Atcheson's finger on the trigger signalled the death of Star of the Sea as an example of how football could bring people together. The beautiful game had failed to live up to its name.<sup>52</sup>

In Scotland, the continuation of rampant sectarianism began to rub casual fans the wrong way. The popularity of Celtic and Rangers began to decline, and success became more fleeting outside of Scotland. Rangers in particular suffered from its continuation of fighting a sectarian battle. By the mid 1980s, it was apparent that Rangers had fallen from grace. Attendance, which had been averaging well over 50,000 per game, was now as low as 7,000 per match.<sup>53</sup> In his book *Heartfelt*, Aiden Smith writes:

Relationships between the Old Firm and the rest of Scottish football have deteriorated in recent years... One of the reasons is that the rest of Scottish football do not view Celtic and Rangers as especially Scottish. The Irish Tricolour flies at Celtic Park, the Union Jack at Ibrox. The Catholic and Protestant traditions of these clubs have never been subliminal, emphasized only through code. But you might have thought the end of the Irish Troubles would have cooled temperatures among the hodden masses. Not a bit.<sup>54</sup>

No longer did the Old Firm capture the imagination of Scotland. It was now seen as an international entity, wrapped up in an old battle that had worn out its welcome with the Scottish fans. Rangers sought to return to glory by removing the restrictions that seemed to be limiting them from greatness. In 1986, the club hired Graeme Souness, an Anglo-Scot player-manager that helped return the club to greatness by attempting to recreate the club as a secular, economically prudent organization. One of his first moves was to see the restriction on signing Catholic players removed to compete with Celtic, who had allowed players of all faiths since its inception. As Gary Armstrong records,

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<sup>52</sup> Denis Campbell, "Was Hunger Striker The Inspiration for Lloyd Webber's Latest...", *The Guardian*, 17 September 2000.

<sup>53</sup> Armstrong, *Fear and Loathing*, p. 28.

<sup>54</sup> Aiden Smith, *Heartfelt: Supping Bovril from the Devil's Cup*, p. 61.

however, “Souness was not adverse to exploiting Rangers’ Scottish-Unionist traditions, most notably signing English players, and displaying pictures of the Queen to his in the build-up to matches against Celtic.” But for as much as Souness wanted from his secularist ambitions while at Ibrox, he allowed “I’ll never be comfortable with bigotry, and it will always be at Rangers.” He left the club in 1991 to manager English side Liverpool.<sup>55</sup>

The rivalry between the two clubs continues to exist, though the sectarian passions have been tempered through the efforts of both clubs. In 1989, Rangers finally signed a Catholic player (though he didn’t actually practice the faith). The signing of Maurice Johnston was seen in Scotland as a move similar to the signing of Jackie Robinson by the Brooklyn Dodgers in the United States. Much like Jackie Robinson, Johnston’s arrival at Ibrox was met with animosity amongst fans. Even Celtic fans saw Johnston as a traitor to the Celtic cause. Johnston faced constant threats, even a few death threats, and Rangers solution was to fly him from Glasgow to London daily. Eventually it all became too much for Johnston, who eventually wound up in the United States to play for a new team in Kansas City, Missouri. Both Celtic and Rangers have also made an effort to encourage their fans to refrain from sectarian related actions, but these attempts at times seem half-hearted, as the sectarian passion drives the sale of merchandise.<sup>56</sup>

Rangers continue to struggle controlling overly passionate fans. As recently as November 2009, Rangers was reprimanded by FIFA, the governing body of international football, for the actions of its fans at a Champions League match in Bucharest. The fans were enraged at the difficulty they had at gaining entry to the stadium for the match, and

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<sup>55</sup> Armstrong, Fear and Loathing, p. 28.

<sup>56</sup> Foer, How Soccer Explains the World, pp. 43, 46-47.

upon entry began tossing items at other fans, on the field, and tore up seats. The reaction of the police was to use tear gas to try to disperse the crowd.<sup>57</sup>

Even taking a cab can be risky business because of the rivalry. In the summation of his chapter on the Old Firm, Franklin Foer writes in *How Soccer Explains the World* about an incident he was involved in:

In Belfast, asking a cabbie to take you to a Rangers club can be tricky business. For that trip, you wouldn't want to gamble with a Celtic supporter or IRA sympathizer behind the wheel, especially if you're drunk and flexing your beer muscles. Jimmy repeatedly tells the driver we're headed to the Glasgow Rangers Club and carefully evaluates each reaction...

Foer continues by describing the fear that sweeps through the cab from the mistaken notion that the cabbie has taken them down Falls Road, a notorious IRA locale.<sup>58</sup> Even in Glasgow, taking a cab can be tricky if you're loud and proud about your club. An American college student recalled her ordeal while catching a cab with a group of Celtic supporters in plain, casual attire. The cab began to take the group to their destination when one of the passengers belted out, "Sure it's the best darnn team in Scotland, And all the players are grand, We support the Celtic..." Immediately the cabbie pulled over and tossed the group from the cab while hurling expletives at them. The cabbie was a Rangers fan.<sup>59</sup>

As Edinburgh newspaper reporter Aiden Smith wrote in *Heartfelt*, many would like to believe that there was an end to the Irish Troubles and this sectarianism is slowly

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<sup>57</sup> BBC Sport, "Rangers Charged Over Fan Violence", 5 November 2009, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/football/teams/r/rangers/8343684.stm>> [9 November 2009] .

<sup>58</sup> Foer, *How Soccer Explains the World*, p. 64.

<sup>59</sup> A story my friend Sara Myers, a Ball State student studying abroad at the University of Strathclyde, shared with me about her first encounter with the Old Firm in Sept. 2009.

becoming a thing of the past, but recent events bring into question how serious the issue continues to be. In February 2010, American winger DaMarcus Beasley, who plays for Glasgow Rangers, was alarmed by a loud noise and looked out his window to find that his car had been fire bombed right outside of his Glasgow apartment. While the motive for attacking Beasley, who played very little for Rangers at the time of the attack, doesn't appear to be football related, other Rangers teammates have had their cars targeted and the targeting appears to be higher around the time Rangers and Celtic square off for Old Firm matches.<sup>60</sup>

Equally as disturbing, in February 2011, a report out of Belfast noted a citywide search for individuals involved in failed bombing attempts. Members of an IRA faction phoned in to police warnings of unexploded bombs located in a car and taped to a preschool-size bike; the bombs appear to have been targeting police officers, but as an AP news article notes, the majority of such attacks since the 1997 IRA cease-fire have failed or have killed innocent people because the lack of organization among the remaining dissidents.<sup>61</sup>

The up tick in sectarian tension in and around the Old Firm has led to returned calls for peace, along with calls for the two clubs to step up the policing of their own fan bases to quell the violence surrounding their matches. Recent matches have been marked by violence, tension, and over-the-top passion both on the pitch and in the stands.

*Telegraph* writer Alan Cochrane reported after an Old Firm match in March 2011 about the notion of Scottish football retaining the term “the beautiful game”:

Has any sobriquet been as misplaced when applied to what goes on

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<sup>60</sup> Ewan Murray, *The Guardian*, 3 February 2010.

<sup>61</sup> *USA Today*, “IRA Dissidents Hid Belfast Bomb...”, 9 February 2011.

surrounding matches between Rangers and Celtic? So are we, as a nation, obsessed with football, or is it more accurate to say that for countless thousands in Glasgow and the West of Scotland, the much more important addiction is to religious bigotry? And Old Firm football is merely the vehicle for expressing that bigotry? There were vehement denials from the chief executives of both Rangers and Celtic that such a situation was anything to do with the clubs. They also managed to stretch our credulity when they said the media had overreacted to the disgraceful scenes during and after the latest of these sorry fixtures last week.

Overreaction? When the Chief Constable asks the First Minister for a summit? Overreaction? When the incidents reach the floor of the Scottish Parliament? Overreaction? When the images of violence go around the world? Overreaction? When incidents of domestic violence are going through the roof in the aftermath of such games? And when the Celtic manager is under 24-hour protection after receiving death threats? Overreaction? What planet do these people inhabit?<sup>62</sup>

As Cochrane hints at in his column, the two clubs have made limited attempts to combat the violence at these matches. Alcohol sales have been limited around the two stadiums on the day of matches and are prohibited inside of the stadium. Police continually monitor the fans of both clubs and distinct lines are quite literally drawn in the stadium; one of the identifying markers of an Old Firm match is the line of yellow coated police dotting vacant seats that separate the two groups of fans. The work of the security, at least within the stadium, has actually been noted as being a textbook case of making security work to provide safety at major events. Andrew Collier noted in his article for *The Scotsman*:

Actually, Rangers and Celtic matches are by no means the worst to contain," says one leading security official, used to managing their games on a regular basis. "The fans are segregated during the match, and everyone knows the score. They are kept apart and supporters of one team do not attempt to infiltrate the other's portion of the ground. We have long experience of dealing with Old Firm games and we know where the potential flash points are. We've learned to manage them successfully."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Alan Cochrane, "It's Up to the Clubs...", *The Telegraph*, 9 March 2011.

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Collier, "Business Security: Case Studies", *The Scotsman*.





*Celtic Park at an Old Firm match in 2008. Celtic fans on the left flying the Irish Tricolour and in green, Rangers fans on the right wearing blue. Union Jacks were for a time prohibited at Celtic Park. Note the empty seats and security guards in the section between the two groups.<sup>64</sup>*

In an increasingly global society, local feuds like the Old Firm are becoming increasingly rare. Perhaps the fact that the Old Firm extends well beyond the city of Glasgow, with sectarian tones that resonate throughout the British Isles, allows for the fact that this rivalry continues to stir the intense passions of fans on both sides. In the past two decades, the clubs have tried to make strides to temper the violence and quiet the harsh chants, but those words continue to echo at Celtic Park and Ibrox. The future of the two clubs is far from certain, but what is certain is that the traditions born through the years of the rivalry and the identity of the supporters will continue to reflect the nature of larger society in Glasgow, Scotland. And so long as the two clubs play the game, there will be undying loyalty and passion for the clubs.

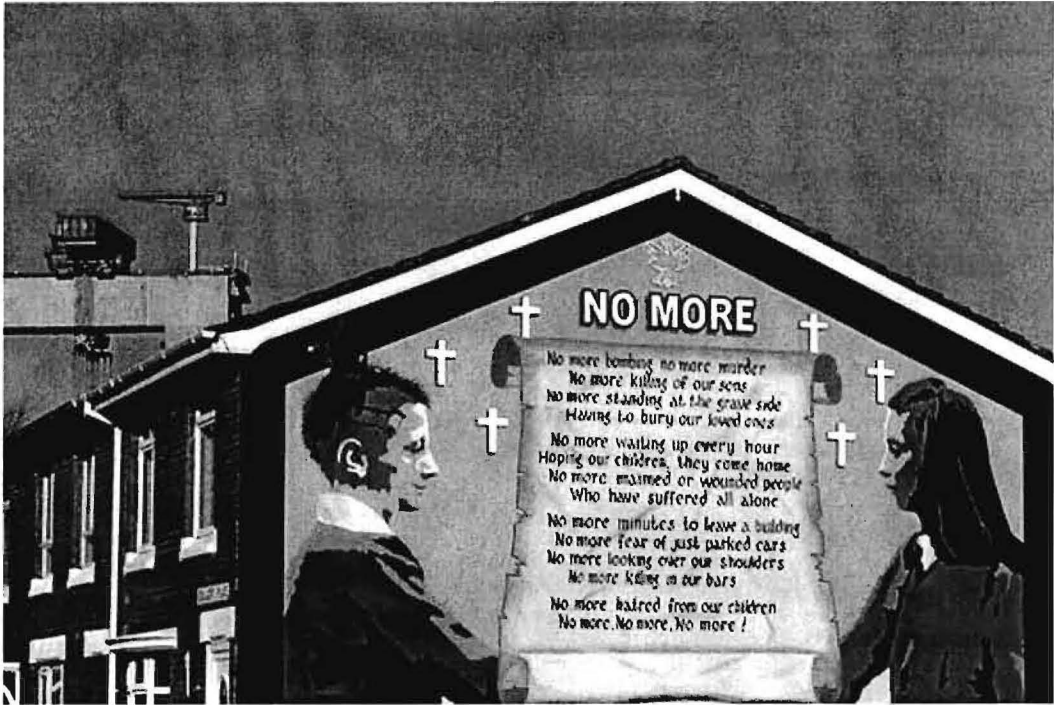
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<sup>64</sup> “Old Firm”, <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Oldfirm.jpg>>.

I've got a friend who was a doctor; I won't mention his name. He was called out to a house in Lanarkshire. A child had been very badly burned – I think it was boiling water over him or something – and he had to be rushed to the hospital. The father was putting his coat on. The doctor said, 'This child is very ill. Have to get him to the hospital.' 'I canny take him', the man says. 'Celtic are playing Leeds tonight'. And he went out.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Walsh, Voices, p. 24.



*Mural in Belfast depicting two figures  
Blue for Rangers, Green for Celtic, shaking hands.  
The mural reads as follows:*

No more bombing, no more murder  
No more killing of our sons  
No more standing at the grave side  
Having to bury our loved ones

No more waking up every hour  
Hoping our children, they come home  
No more maimed or wounded people  
Who have suffered all alone

No more minutes to leave a building  
No more fear of just parked cars  
No more looking over our shoulders  
No more killing in our bars

No more hatred from our children  
No more. No more. No more!<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> "No More", <[http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2710/4439423074\\_886855ab19.jpg](http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2710/4439423074_886855ab19.jpg)>.

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